

GREEN LEPROSY

by

Chaplain (Maj) James R. Cotter

January 29, 1985

GREEN LEPROSY

Leper! Leper!

This cry strikes terror in the hearts of those who hear. It was a cry of alarm; a warning that an unclean person was approaching. To come into contact with a leper could cost you your life.

For those who were unclean, it meant a life of begging for just the essentials like food. It meant a nomadic existence; a life filled with loneliness and the knowledge of being not just unloved but despised. It meant a life of deep and intense pain that can only be soothed by death itself.

Leprosy

Leprosy starts as a simple rash, whitish in color, and may go undetected for a long time. After awhile this rash becomes more noticeable and grows on the skin. It is during this early stage that the leper may come into contact with clean people without being detected as having leprosy. Detection and the cry of warning generally come only after the disease has caused pieces of flesh to fall from the hands.

The disease spreads and it begins to be more noticeable. Originally people believed that slowly and painfully this carnivorous disease ate its way through the outer layers of skin and into the muscle tissue. It began to devour the muscle in much the same way a termite devours wood.

Slowly the ears are consumed allowing time for the scabbing over of the raw and infected tissue. Generally the scabs fall into the ear canal and mix with pieces of flesh creating a blockage so sound can no longer pass to the eardrum leaving the leper in a world of silence.

The decaying flesh now becomes the point of infection as insects and bacteria lay siege to the area. Pus pockets are formed creating an unsightly and often repulsive picture. Most generally affected at this stage of deterioration are the eyes. For as more and more bacteria grow and as the

insects' larva grow the eyes swell closed and the leper stumbles into a world of darkness.

Next the nasal cavity becomes infected and, like the rest of the decaying flesh, it too disintegrates leaving the victim gasping for every breath he takes. Soon the leprosy will make its way to the lungs paralyzing them. (A blessing in disguise as it serves to nullify the sense of smell--the smell of the onset of his own imminent death!)

By now the leprosy has descended the trunk of the body and taken rest in the feet rendering them immobile. Now the leper is totally dependent on "friends" (other lepers) for food and movement.

As these outward attacks on the flesh continue to consume it, the internal organs struggle to survive. The leprosy that has devoured the outer muscles now lays seige on the joints and bones. Once it attacks here, it rapidly proceeds to devour the bone marrow. The entire body is racked with the leprosy and bit by bit the life of the leper has rotted away.

Finally, deliverance from this dreaded disease! It doesn't come from medication, but from death. Leprosy devours the heart or the lungs and all too long after the white rash first appeared, the end of life has agonizingly arrived.¹

Such is the pain-filled demise of one with the disease of leprosy. But does leprosy truly behave in the aforementioned way? Is this really the way it is? Is there a way to discover the cause of this disease thereby finding a cure?

Cause

Smith's Bible Dictionary indicates the causes may be manifold:

"It was (1) hereditary; (2) contagious; (3) ever intending to increase; (4) incurable except by the power of God; (5) a shame and a disgrace; (6) rendering one alone in the world; (7) deforming, unclean; (8) separating the

soul from God, producing spiritual death; (9) unfitting it forever from heaven and the company of the holy, and insuring its external banishment as polluted and abominable."²

In the Old Testament it was thought to be punishment from God. In early years of research it was thought to be a consumption of flesh by disease. But current medical research indicates that this disease is not truly one of deterioration of the flesh, but more so one which attacks the nervous system.

Dr. Paul Brand, who has over eighteen years in research with leprosy patients in India writes:

"As I studied leprosy patients in India, several findings pushed me toward a rather simple theory: could it be that the horrible results of the disease came about because leprosy patients had lost the sense of pain? The disease was not at all like a flesh devouring fungus; rather it attacked mainly a single type of cell, the nerve cell. After years of testing and observation, I felt sure that the theory was sound."

"The gradual loss of the sense of pain leads to misuse of those body parts most dependent on pains protection. A person uses a hammer with a splintery handle, does not feel pain, and an infection flares up. Another steps off a curb spraining an ankle, and oblivious, keeps walking. Another loses use of the nerve that triggers the eyelid to blink every few seconds for lubricating moisture, the eye dries out and the person becomes blind."

"The millions of cells in a hand or foot, or the living and alert rod and cone cells in the eye, can be rendered useless because of the breakdown of just a few nerve cells. Such is the tragedy of leprosy."³ (emphasis mine)

The research done by Dr. Brand and others clearly contradicts the image of a man's skin and body being devoured by a carnivorous fungus. Thanks to these men, leprosy has virtually been eliminated from the face of the earth...; yet within the United States there is a new strain of leprosy.

Green Leprosy

This new strand of leprosy is not the whitish color that we spoke of earlier, but it is green in appearance. It acquired this name because its strain of fungus has been found only within a specific group of individuals, those who wear the Army green uniform.

Like its cousin white leprosy, its onset is hardly noticed. The disease takes a progressive deterioration of the body, but its pain is often masked in pleasurable feelings. Green leprosy is far more dangerous than white leprosy in that white leprosy surrenders with death, whereas green leprosy affects the individual long after his body is planted in the ground.

The intensity of pain of this form of leprosy is not found in physical pain but in a spiritual holocaust; it condemns the individual to the eternal fires of hell.

Green leprosy is highly contagious and as such easily communicated to those who even have a flirting relationship with Army Green.

Research and Symptomology

Because of its highly contagious nature, the only way to study Green leprosy is from a safe distance and being gowned in protective clothing.

The following is a profile of a typical soldier who comes into contact with those afflicted with Green leprosy. I use the male soldier only because of the vast amount of data available. However in more recent years, with the influx of female personnel into the army and the data collected, it would be appropriate to change the pronoun he to she and to make minute changes in the outward manifestation of the disease. Simply put, one's gender does not give one immunity.

A young man has just graduated from high school and decides that his best opportunity for schooling and job experience comes by enlisting in the Army. As he enters basic training he takes with him those totally acceptable

Judeo-Christian ethics; proper language (no swearing in mixed company, and certainly not the use of "four-lettered words" just to express a thought or ask for something at the supper table); a healthy respect for alcoholic beverages; a respect for the opposite sex; and disgust for gross pornographic literature and pictures.

Then comes the onset of the disease. He is stripped of his civilian ("pure") clothes and handed several Army green uniforms. He puts them on and they feel good; maybe he looks a little taller, more mature, and certainly more or a "macho" man.

As he mixes with the others in his billets, green leprosy begins to settle in. It slowly attacks that central nervous system of the soul, numbing both the new heart and the conscience.

The initial numbing takes place through the action of hearing. Some of those gathered around this "new B" have already learned to communicate in the basic language known as crude; the four-letter words easily slip through their lips. Often even those assigned to take care of him (D. I.'s) have a certain way of phrasing things that deeply penetrate and begin to erode the old standards. In an effort to fit in, conform, he too uses the initial jargon of Green Leprosy. He is no longer offended at hearing it, and as they march or jog for P.T. he shouts out the cadence loud and clear and maybe even leads the jodie. Rarely now does he utter a sentence without using the "expletive deleted" adverbs and adjectives. Instead of "Please pass the salt," it is "....."

A few days ago he would have been embarrassed for mom to hear him even tell an "off-colored" joke; now he runs through the streets and leads the dirty songs.

Green leprosy has begun its strangle hold of the soul; no longer is the heart or conscience pricked by foul language.

The second stage of this progressively degenerative disease involves the desire to prove one's manliness with his fellow lepers (peers), and what better avenue than through alcohol consumption; going out and getting plastered or participating in drinking contests.

Alcohol speeds up the decaying process of Green leprosy. It helps it spread by anaesthetizing the conscience, by drugging the old values and standards and releasing all inhibitions. It may even unleash an angry and violent aspect foreign to him before, but now he is willing to do battle with anyone who even lights his cigarette wrong. Several weeks ago he may have had a few beers but never a drunken brawl.

Green leprosy marches on, and while feeling comfortable with being a man with the guys, a desire arises to be macho and virile. He begins to prowl around for that evening experience with the "ladies," regardless of whether there is a wife or girlfriend at home. And while engaged in these sinful activities, Green leprosy takes a more fatal grasp of his soul.

What was once thought of as a very personal and sacred act is shared as a conquest. Another notch in the handle of being a man; and another sign of the deterioration caused by the disease.

"Hey guys, the sarge has some real good flicks; be in the supply room at midnight. He says they're really gross."

The order of events may be somewhat changed in each individual case, but the final outcome will always be the same. The basic teachings of morality and Judeo-Christian standards, his conscience, that were an active part of his life have been destroyed by Green leprosy. What is left? All that remains is a rotting soul, a hollow shell of a man.

An interesting observation is that if the young man should return home without his green uniform or without his fellow lepers, his leprosy usually goes into a state of remission. To some degree his Judeo-Christian ethics return.

But like cancer, Green leprosy is progressive. Remission ends the instant he returns to those with this disease and picks up where it left off. (This phenomenon can readily be seen in the behavior of National Guard and Reserve soldiers. Their behavior begins to deteriorate on weekend drills, but when they go for two weeks of annual training Green leprosy consumes the soldiers. The leprosy controls him; the clearly defined limitations of right and wrong are quickly eroded and torn down. His sensitivity to the needs of those at home and those around him vanishes and he becomes lost in the deterioration of the soul.) Our soldier will soon be diagnosed as terminal; for no surgery can ever repair the hardening of the heart which is the final stage of Green leprosy.

And if he were to die in this state, what would happen to his soul? Where would he spend eternity?

Scriptural Principles

The spiritual decline parallels that which Paul writes about in Romans 1: 18-27.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the Creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

"For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the forms of corruptible man and of birds and four footed animals and crawling creatures."

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts impurity.

That their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

"For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire towards one another, men with women committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the true penalty of their sin."⁴

The symptomology of Green leprosy is seen in this section of Scripture. The individual is affected by sin gradually and then finally consumed by it. The individual becomes complacent with the teachings he has been given; they are no longer important to him in light of his new setting and new friends. He becomes infected with this disease. Gradually the resistance gets lower and lower and the disease becomes stronger and stronger until the final stage is reached.

Notice that the initial phase is rejection which starts in the mind. They knew God and His teachings, at least in the sense of basic behavior, and yet they honored Him not. In each of the phases observed, the decay was gradual, each progressive step slightly farther away from God than the one before. And, unfortunately, the pain and damage to the soul went unnoticed since the action brought pleasure not pain.

Impact on Body

For the lack of a nail, a shoe was lost.

For the lack of a shoe, a horse was lost.

For the lack of a horse, a rider was lost.

For the lack of a rider, a battle was lost.

For the lack of a battle, a war was lost.

Paul tells us that "A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough"⁵
(Gal. 5:9). Some translate this as "a rotten apple spoils the whole barrel."

One individual who suffers from Green leprosy can infect all with whom he comes into contact and thereby, like the nail, cause a loss of the war with Satan. Paul reinforces this idea when he refers to the different parts of the body impacting the entire body (1 Cor. 12). For example, if a person has a toothache, the pain isn't isolated to the tooth but flows to the jaw, head, neck shoulders, and throughout the entire body. The toothache affects every part of the body in some way.

When one member of the body doesn't function properly all members suffer. Likewise it is with the body of believers. When one person of the body is afflicted with leprosy all in that body are affected.

There is yet another way of looking at this verse from Paul; that is from a positive perspective. Just as one small bit of leaven causes all the dough to rise from its flatness and seek a higher level, so one person can enter into the life of a leper, or into an entire colony of lepers, and change their whole lives.

We look at the life of Father Damien who was sent to the leper colonies on the island of Molokai. He was able to be the leaven that raised the lifestyle of all the lepers he met.⁶

Where can one buy this leaven; this sorely needed medication that can conquer Green leprosy? Who can provide this magical potion or mythical elixir that cures the souls of men? Where is it to be found?

Physician Care and "Cure"

How does one stop the fatal spread of Green leprosy? From our observation point it has been noted that this isn't really a medical condition but a spiritual one. Therefore, the cure must come from the greatest physician of all and through His instruments such as the Chaplains.

Within the Army the primary role and function of a Chaplain can become lost in the shuffle of paperwork; E.O. programs, last ditch counseling referrals by the Commander just prior to him eliminating the soldier from the Army, morale officer, or fund custodian. The primary role of a Chaplain is to be the Spiritual healer and the Spiritual leader as women and men fight the never ending battle with sin, satan and the flesh.

Lt. Gen. Robert Arter said, "It is the officers duty to lead men; it doesn't matter what branch you are in. You are to be a leader first and foremost,"⁷ Chaplains must lead the fight against Green leprosy. It is a Chaplain's job to be a "Green Leprosy Buster."

In order to fulfill this awesome task, the Chaplain must first return to the word of God and the very words spoken by Christ. "And He(Jesus) said to them, 'No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me.' Physician heal yourself." (Lk. 4:23)⁸

Or those uttered by the mocking crowd as they spit upon the Lord and abused him: "And those who were passing by were hurling abuse at Him wagging their heads, and saying, 'You who destroyed the temple and rebuilt it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' In the same way the chief priests along with the scribes and elders were mocking Him and saying, 'He saved others; He cannot save Himself!'" (Matt. 27:39-42)⁹

The focal point of this is that we, as Chaplains, often become subtle victims of Green leprosy. In order to "fit in," to show the boys that they can rap with us, or that we can relate to "where they are," we speak in their terms by using "soft core four-letter words." We make light of their swearing and don't point it out as being wrong. We may even throw in an "off-colored" joke or a risque one just to ease the tension.

We visit the soldier at the billets or in the orderly room and on the table

is a "flesh" magazine. Maybe while he is out of the room we pick it up and thumb through it, "just to stay abreast of what the soldier reads." We may joke about it with him or keep silent instead of recognizing it as a warning sign, a symptom, of Green leprosy.

Gradually, ever so gradually, our own "spiritual nervous system" has become anaesthetized to sin and Green leprosy spreads.

The individual soldier will aspire to achieve only to that level or standard that he sees or that which is expected. That's why the Chaplain must lead the way; he must be the Spiritual role model for the soldier. He must lead by example.

Leading by example is a basic leadership principle as well as a Biblical one.

1 Cor. 11: 1; "Be imitators of me just as I also am of Christ."¹⁰(emphasis mine)

1 Cor. 4: 16 & 17; "I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ just as I teach everywhere in every church."¹¹(emphasis mine)

Num. 27: 16 & 17; "May the Lord, the God of the Spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation (Chaplain), who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them and bring them in that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd."¹²(emphasis mine)

I am not implying that we as Chaplains must walk on water, but we should be continually striving for the perfection of God. We are not perfect, but even the way we handle our imperfection is to be pointing to Jesus Christ, the cure for Green leprosy.

In the 13th and 14th chapters of Leviticus, there are ways of diagnosing leprosy and also the treatment of one with leprosy. Yet the cure can only come from God. So it is with Green leprosy; the cure can only come from God.

It can only be treated effectively with the love of Jesus Christ, anointed with His blood shed on Calvary and wrapped in the righteousness and glory of His resurrection.

It is only by using God's power that the Chaplain can cleanse himself and be able to eradicate Green leprosy.

The nation of Israel was called and separated from Egypt and the rest of the world because they were to be different. God gave them a different way of worship, different clothes to wear, and different food to eat so that those in and of the world would see the loving power of God. Chaplains have also been called to be different. We are to be the instruments of God (heaven) which He uses to bring healing to the lepers.

Programs/Process

When a problem has been diagnosed, in this case a disease, everyone immediately tries to develop programs which will provide the "cure." Unfortunately Green leprosy has been so engrained in the military lifestyle that no one program can be designed; instead a long process must take place, one that contains a number of different programs.

As stated earlier, the Chaplain needs to always be fighting Green leprosy within himself by striving to be an imitator of our Lord. While never quite reaching the point of perfection, he must reach out to those who are also afflicted.

There are numerous programs that a Chaplain or Chapel center can offer to soldiers. Most are traditional: worship services, Bible study groups (on Sundays, for breakfast during the week, for a dessert gathering in their billets, etc.) coffee houses; informal fellowship times, and church retreats. (See Annex A for a more detailed view of these).

But a Chaplain is only using part of his arsenal of weapons if he limits himself solely to traditional programs. He must be innovative or

adapt things from other programs that seem to work. Developing a long-range set of goals that attack the various stages of leprosy is helpful.

Declare war on swearing and the using of God's name in vain. Sponsor an annual "Swear-out Day" similar to a "Smoke-out Day!" Perhaps you can arrange it on the same day as the National Prayer Day. Begin by passing out cards with this one of General Washington's general orders printed on it. "The General is sorry to be informed that the foolish and wicked practice of profane cursing and swearing, a vice heretofore little known in an American Army is growing into fashion; he hopes the officers will by example as well as by influence, endeavor to check it, and that both they and the men will reflect that we can have little hope of the blessing of heaven on our armies if we insult it by our impiety and folly; added to this it is a vice so mean and low, without any temptation that every man of sense and character detests and despises." ¹³

Offer prizes for those sections which make it through the day. Those sections that fail to make it should have it pointed out to them and be presented with a little reminder to help them the next time (Annex B). Remember, "It's not what goes into the mouths of men that defiles God, but that which comes out." ¹⁴

The army itself has seen the dangers in the abuse of alcohol and is beginning to take steps to help the soldiers. The Chaplain can be a valuable resource if he becomes active in this program.

As Green leprosy progresses, so does the problem of eradicating it. When it comes to the issue of pornography one runs into some real difficulties; real, but not insurmountable problems.

Pornography can be found and purchased almost anywhere, including the stores on post; this creates a problem for the Chaplain. The problem is that his sphere of authority is not as far reaching, or as financially

profitable, as is the pornographic material. But the situation is not hopeless. Several years ago Chaplains were successful in getting the "soft-porn" magazines off the easy access rack or placed where the nude covers could be concealed. Go one step farther; talk to the PX manager and see if he/she will not sell any of these magazines for a three month period (This would allow time to evaluate the financial impact on the store). If the customers complain, have the manager take their name and address and you make a personal visit to explain why they aren't available.

Conclusion

The physical decay and death of a person due to white leprosy or any disease is very tragic and so painful to observe. The spiritual death of a person, the gradual hardening of the heart due to sin and a sin-filled life, is far more tragic in that its effect will go on for eternity.

Green leprosy, the gradual spiritual decay of soldiers in the army, is the responsibility of all Christians, but more so that of the Chaplain. It is our duty to our Lord and to our country to care for the spiritual welfare of those entrusted to us and to eradicate this potentially damning disease.

FOOTNOTES

¹Paul H. Brand & Philip Yancey, Fearfully and Wonderfully Made, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), pp. 32-37.

²William Smith, Smith Bible Dictionary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1948), p. 357.

³Brand, Fearfully and Wonderfully Made, p. 37.

⁴A. J. Holman Co., New American Standard Bible, (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1973), Rm. 1:18-27.

⁵Ibid., Gal. 5:9.

⁶Catholic University of America, New Catholic Encyclopedia, (Washington D.C.: McGraw Hill, 1967), "Father Damien"

⁷Robert Arter, Lt. Gen., Speech made to USANG, November 1964.

⁸Holman Co., New American Standard, Lk. 4:23.

⁹Ibid., Matt. 27:39-42.

¹⁰Ibid., 1 Cor. 11:1.

¹¹Ibid., 1 Cor. 4:16-17.

¹²Ibid., Numbers 27:16-17.

¹³George Washington, Wall poster with no references.

¹⁴Holman Co., New American Standard, Matt. 15:18.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brand, Paul H. & Philip Yancey. Fearfully and Wonderfully Made, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980

Catholic University of America. New Catholic Encyclopedia, Washington D.C.: McGraw Hill, 1967

Holman, A.J. Company. New American Standard Bible, New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1973

Smith, William. Smith Bible Dictionary, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1948

Arter, Robert, Lt. Gen. Speech given to USANG, Officer's Open Mess, Nov. 17, 1984
Washington, George. Wall poster without any references

ANNEX A

Worship Services

Worship services should be conducted with the sole purpose of meeting the needs of to whom the Chaplain is ministering. It should be respectful of God and His house of worship, yet not stuffy so as to be viewed as "old fashioned." Sunday morning 8/9 A.M. services may be fine for the family man, but the soldier living in a billet doesn't stir much before 10.

Sermons must feed the soul, providing the soldier with spiritual nourishment. They must attack the feelings of loneliness, the temptations of the flesh, the peer pressure. They must also show how God, their loving heavenly Father, can lift them from their troubles and forgive their sins. How He can heal their Green leprosy.

Bible Study Groups

Again the main thrust is to be the Spiritual feeding and uplifting of the soldier. This can only be accomplished by meeting his needs, by being available when he is available, by studying topics that he wants to study.

Coffee Houses

Coffee houses of various sorts have been around for a long time. Formal or informal, they afford the soldier the opportunity to share his or her problems, to meet with others, and the "get away from it all" in a wholesome environment. Coffee houses allow a Christian to be a Christian without fear or intimidation.

Informal Fellowship

The time either prior to a service or immediately following a service when people gather in the love of God can be an important sharing time for the soldiers and Chaplain. It is essential that the Chaplain mix and mingle with those active in the body, to reinforce their being at worship and to

listen intently to all who speak to him. Also, lunch in the mess hall or P.T. with the troops can provide time and opportunity for the fellowship so important between the Chaplain and the soldiers.

Retreats

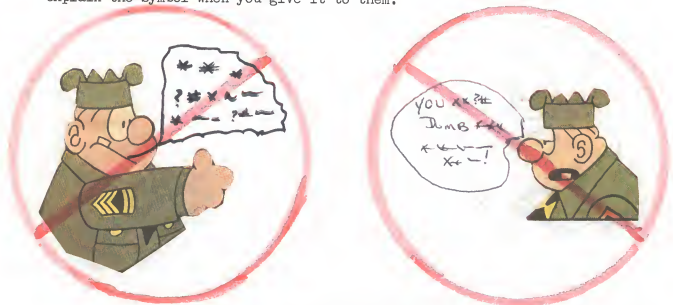
A period of several days in which a person can escape from the pressures of the military and commune with God can be a big step forward in fighting Green leprosy. It always works best to remove the soldier from the military environment. Sometimes there are retreat centers nearby facilitating this activity. If not, a little creative thinking and contact with local churches or hotels may provide the solution.

It is important to remember, that retreats are most effective when they are limited to one area or problem. It is almost fruitless to approach a retreat as a one-time inoculation for all ills.

ANNEX B

There are many ways to make your "Swear-out" campaign a success; you are limited only by your imagination. Here are two ideas to get the ball rolling.

Make posters to put in the offices and billets, something like this, and explain the symbol when you give it to them.



Another idea is to give each soldier the following list to post in his locker, billet, or his place of work.

TEN REASONS WHY I SWEAR

1. It pleases my mother so much.
2. It is a fine mark of manliness.
3. It proves I have self-control.
4. It indicates how clearly my mind operates.
5. It makes my conversation so pleasing to everybody.
6. It leaves no doubt in anyone's mind as to my good breeding.
7. It impresses people that I have more than ordinary education.
8. It is an unmistakable sign of culture and refinement.
9. It makes me a very desirable personality among women and children and in respectable society.

10. It is my way of honoring God who said, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain,"